

# *Mount Airy Environs Community Comprehensive Plan*

## ***Chapter 1: Introduction***

### **Plan Definition and Purpose**

The purpose of the comprehensive plan is to provide a legal framework that guides the growth and development of a community. A set of goals is developed to help achieve the overall vision for the future of the community. Specific actions and policies that are needed to implement the goals are recommended and become a work program for the local government, community leaders, and citizens of the community. Decisions and activities that are made and undertaken subsequent to the adoption of a plan should be consistent with the intent and content of the plan.

**Vision or Vision Statement** ☞ **A vision is a statement that defines a community's preferred future.** To choose a direction, a community must first develop a mental image of a possible and desirable future state. This vision should articulate a feasible, achievable, realistic, and attractive future for the community, which should be a future that is better than that of existing conditions. The process of developing a vision not only helps to define the community's preferences and desires for the future but also helps to empower members of the community. A *shared* vision builds community between the public and private, the leaders, and the residents. It encourages cooperation and coordination among the stakeholders. It is also easier to establish priorities when community leaders know what end they are working toward. The defined vision must become an integral part of the management and operation of the local government(s) and the activities in which residents participate. The purpose of this vision statement is to serve as a guide that community leaders and decision makers use as a basis for the decisions made and activities undertaken.

**Goals** ☞ **A goal identifies the purpose toward which an endeavor is directed.** Goals are broad statements of intended accomplishments which, if achieved as a whole, would bring the community closer to meeting its overall vision of the future. They do not identify specific activities that will be undertaken. Rather, they identify a set of objectives designed to guide the community toward meeting its goals.

**Policies** ☞ **A policy identifies the course of action to be taken when presented with a decision to be made on a given issue.** To fulfill its role as a guidance tool, policy statements are included in the plan. These policy statements express the community's desires for future decisions and help to guide the achievement of the goals they have developed. The policies indicate the direction that decision-makers would take when decisions are to be made regarding county services and land use development. The policy statements are based on an overall set of goals for the community and its future.

**Actions** ☞ **An action is a recommended activity to help bring a community closer to achieving its goal(s).** Goals help to identify where a community wants to be and toward what they are striving. However, they do not identify specific things that can be done to help the community get there. Actions are planning, land use, and general government-related activities that can be pursued, ideally as a whole and in combination with the recommended policies, to help the community meet its goals. Actions are often referred to as objectives or implementation

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measures.

The comprehensive plan for a specific community within Carroll County, a small area plan called a “community comprehensive plan,” gives that community the opportunity to study in more detail the factors which influence its area and provides more direction on what the community hopes to accomplish beyond what the County Master Plan addresses. Individual properties can be reviewed, specific areas can be designated for revitalization, and unique functional plan elements can be developed to apply to these small areas. These more detailed activities and items would not normally be addressed in the County Master Plan.

As a comprehensive plan addresses more than just land uses and zoning, the community comprehensive plan gives a community the opportunity to address such issues as economic development, community involvement, park facilities, and historic resources, among other things. These issues can and should be addressed regardless of whether the community ultimately decides to make changes to the existing land use designation map or zoning districts.

The Plan contained herein presents a set of goals that address the issues of growth management and land use, transportation, community facilities, natural resources, economic development and activity, historic/cultural resources, community involvement, interjurisdictional coordination and communication, and housing and community design. The chapters around which these issues are organized each share common components. They all discuss current conditions, an analysis of community needs, recommended policies and actions, fiscal implications, and anticipated Capital Improvement Program (CIP) projects. These components, which encompass more of the community’s needs than they often have in the past, will be consistent among all the community comprehensive plans as they are updated. Through incorporating a fiscal implications and related CIP projects component, the community will have a plan that is more realistic and better represents what the citizens are willing to accept.

## **Planning Commission Responsibility**

Traditionally, the Planning Commission consists of members of the public at large, who reside in that particular jurisdiction, with little or no formal training in planning. Article 66B authorizes municipalities and counties to create a Planning and/or Zoning Commission made up of five to seven members, one of whom may be a member of the local legislative body to serve in an ex-officio capacity concurrent with his or her official term. Members are appointed by the Mayor or Board of County Commissioners to serve a term of five years, with members' terms staggered so that terms end at different times. Removal of a member may only occur by the legislative body through a public hearing process and filing of a written statement demonstrating inefficiency, neglect of duty, and/or malfeasance in office. The idea of appointing a group of lay people to make decisions and recommendations about land use planning came about to reduce political influence on decisions.

The purpose of the Planning Commission is to serve as advisor to the elected officials, the Town Council or Board of County Commissioners, on land use planning and to review matters related to planning and development. The Commission holds a meeting open to the public on a regular monthly basis to consider land use issues. One of the most significant responsibilities that the Planning Commission is given is the authority to develop the county or

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town's comprehensive plan. Upon completion of a final draft acceptable to the Commission, the members will vote to approve the Plan and will forward it to the elected officials with a recommendation for adoption. The elected officials have the authority to accept or reject this recommendation. While the elected officials cannot make revisions to the Plan themselves, they may send it back to the Planning Commission to make suggested modifications.

The Planning Commission is also empowered with original jurisdiction for the review and approval of subdivision. It is also responsible to develop and approve subdivision regulations which must be adopted by the elected officials in their respective jurisdictions in order to become effective. As with comprehensive plans, the Council or Commissioners may not make changes to the proposal. If the elected officials disapprove the proposal for adoption, they may only send the proposal back to the Commission for revisions. Since the Commission focuses on planning issues, it is a valuable intermediary between the public and the elected officials.

The Planning Commission also makes recommendations to the elected officials on proposals relating to zoning or rezoning. The elected officials have the authority to accept, reject, or modify those recommendations.

Planners are the Commission's research staff. Several of the county's municipalities have a planner on staff. In these cases, the county provides a liaison comprehensive planner to serve in an advisory role and to foster cooperation between the jurisdictions. Many of the municipalities, however, do not employ their own planners. In these cases, the county liaison comprehensive planner also serves as planner for the town and its Planning Commission. The planner advises the Commission on the comprehensive plan, development plans, zoning ordinance, subdivision regulations, and other miscellaneous planning issues. In addition, the planning staff may provide background information and recommendations on the proposals that are under the Commission's consideration and answer technical questions. The liaison planner attends all of the regularly scheduled Planning Commission meetings.

## **State Legislation**

### *1 Article 66B of the Annotated Code of Maryland*

Article 66B, added to the Maryland Code in 1927 and now entitled *Zoning and Planning*, delegates basic planning and land use regulatory powers to the state's municipalities, Baltimore City, and non-charter counties. Important sections of Article 66B apply to charter counties as well.

Under Article 66B, it is the function and duty of the Planning Commission to develop, with help of staff, and approve a plan which will be recommended to the local legislative body for adoption. This required plan serves as a guide to all public and private actions and decisions to ensure that development of public and private property occurs in appropriate relation to each other. This Plan document satisfies the requirement to provide a statement of goals and objectives, principles, policies, and standards which shall serve as a guide for the development and economic and social well being of the jurisdiction.

### *2 Economic Growth, Resource Protection, and Planning Act of 1992*

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On October 1, 1992, the Maryland Economic Growth, Resource Protection, and Planning Act of 1992 (the Planning Act) was passed with the intent of encouraging economic growth, limiting sprawl development, and protecting the state's natural resources. The Planning Act amends Article 66B. Most local jurisdictions in the state have established priority areas for resources protection. The Planning Act encourages these jurisdictions to build on that base with consistent development regulations and targeted infrastructure investment by the state.

A premise of the Act is that the comprehensive plans prepared by counties and towns are the best place for local governments to establish priorities for growth and resource conservation, and that once those priorities are established, it is the state's responsibility to back them up.

The Planning Act is based on eight "Visions." County and municipal plans are required to be amended so that the plans implement an established set of policies, which should be based on the Visions. The Visions are stated in the Act as follows:

- Vision 1** ☞ Development is concentrated in suitable areas.
- Vision 2** ☞ Sensitive areas are protected.
- Vision 3** ☞ In rural areas, growth is directed to existing population centers and resources areas are protected.
- Vision 4** ☞ Stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay and the land is a universal ethic.
- Vision 5** ☞ Conservation of resources, including a reduction in resource consumption, is practiced.
- Vision 6** ☞ To assure the achievement of 1 through 5 above, economic growth is encouraged and regulatory mechanisms are streamlined.
- Vision 7** ☞ Adequate public facilities and infrastructure under the control of the county or municipal corporation are available or planned in areas where growth is to occur.
- Vision 8** ☞ Funding mechanisms are addressed to achieve these visions.

Making the Visions part of Maryland's planning and zoning enabling legislation gives local jurisdictions a concise statement of Maryland's priorities for their plans. Local Planning Commissions must now review, and if necessary, amend their plans at regular six-year intervals. Until the adoption of the Planning Act, there had been no statewide requirement that local jurisdictions review their plans on a regular basis. This provision ensures that plans are frequently reconsidered in light of new needs.

### *3 Smart Growth and Neighborhood Conservation Act of 1997*

The 1997 General Assembly adopted several specific programs, which together form the *Smart Growth* initiatives. Under these initiatives, counties may designate areas as Priority Funding Areas if they meet guidelines for intended use, availability of plans for sewer and water systems, and permitted residential density. The state will not put their funds where development is low in density; there must be an average density of 3.5 dwelling units per acre to qualify for state funds. Existing communities and areas where industrial or other economic development is desired are the areas that are eligible for county designation. Counties may also designate areas planned for new residential communities which will be served by water and sewer systems and

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meet density standards. As of October 1, 1998, the state is prohibited from funding growth-related projects not located in a Priority Funding Area.

*Smart Growth* also establishes a Rural Legacy program to preserve sensitive rural areas and to help jurisdictions purchase agricultural land easements, a brownfields program to encourage redevelopment, a Job Creation Tax Credit to promote revitalization, and a Live Near Your Work program to promote settling in older urban areas.

## **Meeting the Eight Visions**

The *Mount Airy Environs Community Comprehensive Plan* sets forth to implement the Eight Visions in the Planning Act. ***Development is concentrated in suitable areas, and, in rural areas, growth is directed to existing population centers and resource areas are protected.*** The suitable areas for development in Carroll County are the Community Planning Areas, or CPA's. The CPA's are areas for which a more detailed plan (than the *Carroll County Master Plan*) is prepared. These areas are also usually designated to accept new growth. Public water and sewer services are generally provided here, along with other services. Most of the CPA's are centered around an incorporated municipality, which has been in existence since the turn of the century or longer, where densities are higher than in the rural areas, and which boasts historic qualities.

The County actively pursues the preservation of agricultural land as a basic premise on which other planning efforts are focused. Preservation of agricultural land helps to protect the resource lands as well as encourage growth to locate where services are available.

The plan also demonstrates that ***sensitive areas are protected and stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay and the land is a universal ethic.*** In addition to making good use of the land through preserving agriculture and concentrating growth in designated areas, the plan suggests actions that can be taken to achieve the goal of preserving environmental resources. Innovative and resourceful community design and provision of measures to further protect the water supply, are among the many recommendations the community will consider to use the land efficiently and to reduce and mitigate the impacts of development on environmental resources. These activities, as well as the previously-mentioned land preservation efforts, show that ***conservation of resources, including a reduction in resource consumption, is practiced*** in Carroll County.

Economic development is a vital part of Carroll's economy and tax base. The *Carroll County Master Plan* addresses measures to ensure that ***economic growth is encouraged and regulatory mechanisms are streamlined.*** A threshold for the county to maintain its industrial and commercial tax base has been identified. The goal is for commercial and industrial uses to represent a minimum of 12 percent of the tax base as new development occurs, as it will help the County provide needed services and the economic development will bring jobs to the county. The addition of the Employment Campus land use designation seeks to capitalize on the area's close proximity to the I-70 corridor and its potential economic development benefits. Additionally, the County has been implementing numerous streamlining measures to make the regulatory process more efficient, more user-friendly, and more effective.

The plan provides measures to ensure that ***adequate public facilities and infrastructure***

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*under the control of the County or municipal corporation are available or planned in areas where growth is to occur.* The County provides many of the facilities and services needed by the residents of the Mount Airy environs community. The County adopted a Concurrency Management Ordinance. This program is designed to phase and time growth and public facilities through the County's Community Investment Program (CIP). Any planned residential growth within the county is permitted to proceed at a rate that will not unduly strain public facilities, especially schools, roads, water and sewer facilities, and police, fire, and emergency medical services. The Town also updated their Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance to address these same issues on the municipal level in January of 2003.

*Funding mechanisms have been addressed to achieve the visions,* is achieved through the creative use of the annual Community Investment Program, the Town-County Agreement, Concurrency Management, and other implementation recommendations. Allocating adequate funding for land acquisition and preservation, economic development opportunities, and revenue sharing with the County further assures the attainment of this vision.